

793 and the exorcism of malevolent spirits. At the time of births, deaths, sickness, the building of new houses, and other important family occasions, priests are invited to offer prayers and sacrifices and extended services appropriate for each case.

A. Prayers and Sacrifices

• 782 Gods and ancestors on the family altar are worshiped generally on the first and the fifteenth days of each month (lunar calendar). Usually candles are lit, incense consecrated, and symbolic "paper currency" is burned for use in the other world. In the minds of the faithful, each god has a personality. Earthly problems and difficulties are brought before gods for assistance, and conditional promises are given that certain sacrifices and donations will be offered if and when the prayers are answered. Sacrifices differ according to the hierarchal positions of the gods in the pantheon. A whole pig is sacrificed, among other food, to the Jade Emperor, to the God of Earth, of Heaven, and of Water, and to the Judicial God in celebration of their name days, on which gay, joyful, and carnival-like festivals are held. To the gods just described and the less important deities may be offered "three sacrifices," generally pork, fish, and chicken; to ancestors, cooked rice and other dishes.

- 782 Sacrifices and food offered once to a god may be again offered to gods of lower rank. All the sacrifices are eventually consumed by those who offer them because gods are thought to require only the essence of each sacrifice.¹⁴

Prayers may be offered by a priest (usually a Taoist), who is paid to ask the gods for the patient's quick recovery, a safe birth, the removal of distress supposedly caused by evil spirits, etc. Prayers commonly heard in temples are not offered in order to seek strength to live a holy life but to ask for practical and immediate benefits.

B. Communication with Spirits

787 Since souls are popularly believed to live in Yin-chien, communication is possible through the media of Taoist practitioners. When someone wishes to communicate with those who are dead, he may ask a medium, usually a devout woman of the faith, to go to a Taoist priest practicing spiritualism. Before the presence of a god, the priest places the medium in a trance. In the trance the medium meets the dead soul through the guidance of the god and is able to answer questions which

14. Masuda, op. cit., pp. 86-88.